

Modesto girl carries the Olympic torch

(William R. Hought is the grandfather of Nancy Ann Coffey. Hought retired from K mart 4116, Modesto, California in April, 1981, after serving the company for 45 years.)

Eleven-year-old Nancy Ann Coffey of Modesto is a champion runner for her age group, but next summer she'll be the envy even of adults.

The sixth-grader at Sherwood Elementary School learned this week she'll get to carry the Olympic Torch for one kilometer (about five-eighths of a mile) as it passes through the Valley in July on its way to Los Angeles for the Olympic Games.

Coffey will be one of more than 10,000 runners who will forward the torch from neighborhood to neighborhood, all the way from New York City to Los Angeles.

She also will be the lucky re-

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cipient of an official Olympic uniform, a life-size replica of the Olympic torch and other mementos of the run.

But the honor is not free.

Although AT&T will pay for the actual costs of the run, the Olympic committee is charging each participant \$3,000. Shares of the \$30 million total raised by torch carriers nationwide will go to each carrier's local Boys Club, Girls Club or YMCA.

The \$3,000 would be pretty steep for an 11-year-old. But Coffey isn't footing the bill. K mart Corporation is.

Her mother, Jane Coffey, said the family sent a letter to the K mart Corporation headquarters asking for sponsorship. A week later, the phone rang, and a store official gave the Coffeys the good news in time for Christmas.

Nancy was at school at the time; her mother sent a balloon bouquet to surprise her.

Lots of details are still unsettled. Coffey doesn't know where in this region she'll carry the torch, for example. But she's got six months

to find out.

Her first priority, she said, is to prepare for the thrilling if weighty responsibility. Not only is the torch a symbol of the Games' eternal spirit, it also is heavy.

According to a magazine story she read, it weighs about three pounds.

So as soon as the rain stops and the puddles disappear, Coffey said she'll be outside getting in her roadwork.

"I'm going to start running around the block with a couple of my mom's friends," she said.

It's not a coincidence Coffey will be carrying the torch, or that K mart became involved. She was the only girl at Sherwood who won the president's physical fitness award last year for achievement in activities such as running, sit-ups and pull-ups. (Four boys won.) K mart was approached, she said, because her grandfather has worked for the chain for many years.

A \$3,000 check from K mart will be presented to Coffey next week at the Modesto store by manager

Dan Long, who said he believes Coffey is the only runner K mart is sponsoring.

"I'm proud of the fact our company did it," Long said. "And I'm proud of her, too."

The torch relay will begin in New York City next May 8 and will conclude during opening ceremonies at the Games on July 28.

Nancy doesn't expect to see the Olympics in person, but at least she'll have her moment of contact. Some day, she said, she might earn the chance to compete. Until then, she'll be out pursuing her favorite pastime.

"I'll be jogging a lot," she said. Reprinted with permission from *The Modesto Bee*, Modesto, California.

Nancy Ann Coffey starts limbering up for her one kilometer torch carry in July.

